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ABSTRACT

This curriculum unit focuses on the Aztec settlement in Mesoamerica comparing it with present-day Mexico. The unit is oriented to teach basic communicative skills to beginning English language learners in small groups of approximately five students. It helps Mexican Spanish-speaking students embrace their own culture and build on their prior knowledge. The unit employs a variety of teaching methods to access the students' different learning modalities. It also includes many hands-on activities to benefit students of varying language proficiency levels and provides suggestions for materials. The unit takes about 15 days to complete and offers a day-by-day detailed procedure for classroom implementation. It contains a sample Aztec legend of Mexico, "The Eagle and the Snake," and lists additional resources and activities, as well as skills to be used by students in this unit. (BT)

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Unit Title: Mexico, Past and Present by Mary Lamken September 2002

Grade Level: 4-6 Beginning English Language Learners

Length of Unit: 3 weeks

Summary: This is a unit on the Aztec settlement in Mesoamerica. I have included comparisons with present day Mexico. It is oriented to teach basic communicative skills to beginning English Language Learners. The groups I will use this with will be small (5 students). For Mexican Spanish-speaking students I hope it will help them embrace their own culture and honor their diversity as they learn English. I hope it will build on their prior knowledge of their native country and allow them a chance to share their personal experiences. I have attempted to employ a variety of teaching methodologies to access the students' different learning modalities. I have included a variety of literature that has simple to more complex language structures. I have also included many hands-on activities to benefit students of varying language proficiency levels. Besides improving communicative skills, this unit should help all students learn content about the history and geography of Mexico.

Suggested Materials:

1. Blank map of North America
2. Flag of Mexico
3. Story map of "The Eagle and the Snake" and story (included here)
4. Coloring Book of How the Aztecs Lived. Burns, Roxanne and Grepe, David. Ediciones Impala, Mexico, D.F. 1999.
5. If You Were There: Aztec Times. Mason, Anthony. Simon and Shuster, NY, NY. 1997.
6. The Tortilla Factory. Paulsen, Gary. Hampton-Brown Books, Carmel, California. 1995.
7. A world atlas or map of Mexico
8. Mexico, the Land. Kalman, Bobbie. Crabtree Publishing, NY, NY. 1993.
9. Crafts from the Past, The Aztecs. Harper Collins, NY, NY. 1997
10. Pablo Remembers: The Fiesta of the Day of the Dead. Ancona, George. Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, NY, NY. 1993.
11. Let's Go Traveling in Mexico. Krupp, Robin Rector. Morror Junior Books, NY, NY. 1996.
12. Exploration Into Latin America. Machado, Ana Maria. New Discovery Books, Parsippany, NJ. 1995.
13. Various craft materials according to which craft projects are chosen

The Eagle and the Snake

An Aztec Legend of Mexico

Long ago, in about the year of 1125, the Aztec people went on a long journey to find a new home. They left their home Aztlan, in Northwest Mexico. They traveled from the north to the south. They walked for a long time. Many babies were born. Many old people died.

They were led by their chieftain, Tenoch. The people were very tired of walking. They wanted to find a new home. They wanted to build houses. They were a very poor people. They ate rats, snakes and stole food from other people.

Tenoch said, "Our god Huitzilopochtli has said to "go on." He told us there is a good place for us. The new place will not be too hot and not be too cold. It will not be too wet and not too dry. Huitzilopochtli has given us a sign to tell us when to stop."

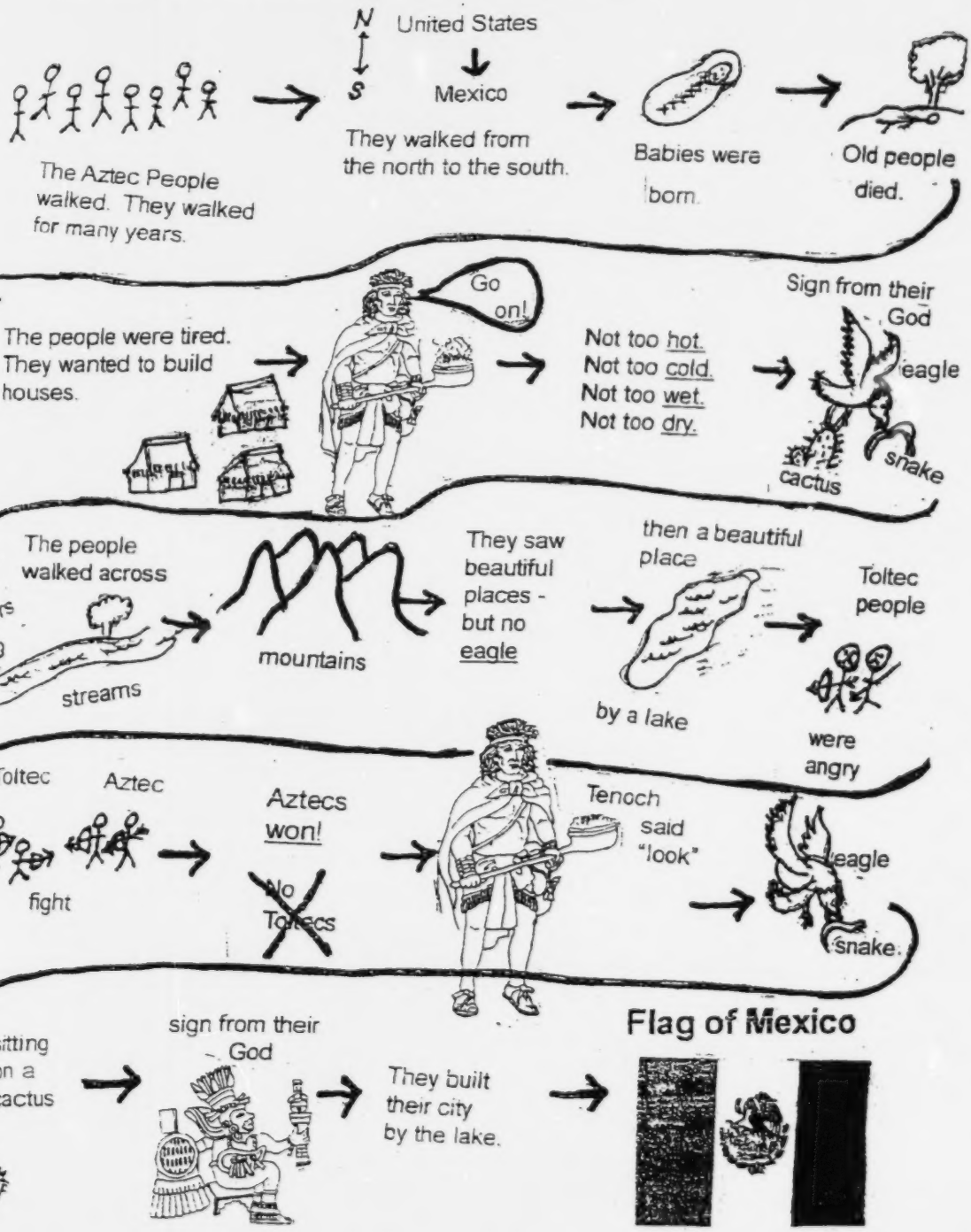
Tenoch told the people that they will see the sign. They will see an eagle. The eagle will have a snake in its beak. The eagle will be sitting on a cactus eating the snake.

The people kept walking. They walked across rivers and streams. They climbed mountains. They saw many beautiful places. They wanted to stay and build their homes. They waited for an eagle but it did not come. Tenoch told the people they must keep walking. The people continued to travel south. They hoped the special place with the eagle was not too far away. The Aztecs walked for many years.

At last, the people came to a beautiful place by a lake. Another group of people were living there. These people were called the Toltec People. They were angry. They wanted the Aztec people to go away. The Toltec people fought with the Aztec people. The Aztecs were a brave people. There were many battles. At last the Aztecs won the final battle. The Toltec people left the beautiful place.

Tenoch looked at the lake. The people needed a safe place to stay for a while. Then some of the people saw the sign. There was an eagle. The eagle had a snake in its beak. The eagle was sitting on a cactus eating the snake. This was the sign from their god Huitzilopochtli. The Aztecs built their city by the lake. They called the city Tenochtitlan. Today the eagle, the snake and the cactus are on the flag of Mexico.

The Eagle and the Snake a story from Mexico



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Unit Activities

Day One:
Preliminary Activities:

A. Use a blank map of North America. Ask students to point to Canada, Mexico, United States. Find the compass rose on the map. Say the name of each of the directions. Ask some questions such as: What is south of Canada? Is Mexico north or south of the US? Find the oceans on the map. Point and ask: Is the Atlantic Ocean east or west of the US? Which ocean is west of Mexico?
B. Use a flag of Mexico. Ask the students to tell you about the flag. What colors are in it? What is in the picture? What kind of bird do you see? What is it eating? Where is the bird sitting? Would you sit on a plant like that?
C. Use the story map to tell the story. Go back over the story and point out specific vocabulary, choosing 10 – 12 words to define using TPR and/or Spanish. Ex. born, die, tired, build, angry, walking, sitting, won, hot, cold, wet, dry
D. Read the story of the Eagle and the Snake.

Day Two:

A. Have students retell "The Eagle and the Snake" using their story maps. Review the vocabulary.
B. Using page 7 of How the Aztecs Lived" discuss the Aztec food market. What are the people selling? Compare this picture with page 21 in Aztec Times. Have students name and label as many items as they can and color them correctly.
C. Use the pictures in both books to make a list of the foods the Aztecs ate. Have students circle the ones they also eat.

Day Three:

Aztecs enjoyed a wide variety of common foods.

A. Choose from the foods listed in the previous activity to have a tasting test.
   Examples: sweet potato peanuts peppers avocado
   pumpkin vanilla squash tortillas corn
B. Define and use vocabulary words to have students describe foods. Include the five senses by asking questions like "What do you see?" "What do you feel?"
   Examples: colors: red, yellow, brown, green, etc.
   textures: hard, soft, smooth, bumpy,
   tastes: sweet, sour, bitter, spicy
   smell: sweet,
   Write sentences with the students to describe the foods.
C. Read The Tortilla Factory

Day Four:

A. Use an atlas or map of Mexico. Have students locate the mountains on the east side and the west side of Mexico. Find the names of the mountain ranges. Locate the deserts. Find lakes and rivers. Have the students draw a basic freehand map of Mexico on another piece of paper. Put some of the landforms (mountains, deserts, rivers, lakes, etc.) on it. Near which city did the Aztecs build their city? Put it on the map. Label the oceans and the Gulf of Mexico.

C. Read page 4 of How the Aztecs Lived. Have the students color all the water blue. Point to the Chinampas. Compare these to the pictures in Aztec Times, page 12 – 13. Have the students look at the picture "The Chinampas today" on page 13. Ask them to point to what is different about the gardens today. Help the students draw a Venn diagram to show similarities and differences.

D. Use Mexico, the Land to see how Mexico looks today. Begin a Venn diagram with the students that compares similarities and differences with ancient Mexico from what they have observed in the other reference books they have been using. Save this diagram to add to as they discover more similarities and differences.

Day Five and Six:

A. Many Arts and Crafts had been made by the craftsmen even before the Aztecs arrived. Read about and discuss pictures in Aztec Times, pages 16 – 17. Look at the Quetzal bird in the center. Ask the students to describe the bird. "What are the people making with the feathers? What other things did they make?

B. Using the easy directions found in Crafts from the Past: The Aztecs have materials available for students to make feather shields, mosaic masks, or woven textiles. Read the directions with students and model following them.

Day Seven:

Discuss the markets of present day Mexico. There are some good pictures in Mexico, the People (see the additional resources list). What things do the people sell and buy? Read Pablo Remembers: The Fiesta of the Day of the Dead. Make a list of the things the family sells in the market. Discuss the Day of the Dead celebration. Have the students tell how they have celebrated this day with their families. What special things did they do? Read about the origins of this fiesta at the end of the book.

Day Eight:

Review the Day of the Dead Celebration. Make "sugar skull" pictures. Use black construction paper and white chalk. Draw a skull using the pictures in the book as a guide. Decorate the skulls using glitter and sequins or other shiny craft items.

Day Nine:

Use How the Aztecs Lived, page 9. Discuss Aztec picture writing. There are also examples in Aztec Times, page 23. Make Bark Paper Codices. Use Brown paper grocery sacks. Have students tear them so that they have about a 12 x 12 piece. Retell the story of the Aztecs finding a place to build their city using the story map. Have the students use markers to draw pictures of their own to tell the story. Paper may be crumpled after drawing to give the paper an aged look. Have the students tell their story to another person. Display bark paintings from Mexico, if they are available.

Day Ten:

Use How the Aztecs Lived, page 12 –13 and the back cover to discuss the Aztec pyramids and their Gods. Use Aztec Times, page 11, to compare pictures of their Gods. Have students point to their body parts. What is missing? What is added? (some are part animal). Have the students create or design a new God that the Aztecs could have worshipped. What would the name of their God be?

Day Eleven:

A God Returns- the Conquistadors

Read in Aztec Times, page 26. Read in Exploration into Latin America, page 19, "The hero who became a god." After reading, ask the students "Who do you think the Aztecs thought Cortes was?" Read in Aztec Times, page 26, "A God Returns." Use the picture in How the Aztecs Lived, page 17, to help the students retell what happened.

Day Twelve:

Use Let's Go Traveling in Mexico. This book uses the feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl as a tour guide around present day Mexico. Picture read the book with the students, having them describe what they see. You could also read this book or parts of it depending on the language proficiency of your students.

Day Thirteen:

Play the game, "The Final Conquest", in Aztec Times on the inside back cover. It is for 2 people but could be played with two teams. One player is Montezuma II, the Aztec Ruler, and the other is Cortes, the Spanish Conqueror. You will need a spinner and 15 counters in 3 colors, 5 of each color.

Day Fourteen:

Finish with a party. Serve tortillas with salsa or tamales. You could make or buy a pinata to fill with candy. Play music from Mexico. Have your Mexican students bring pictures and things to share.

Day Fifteen:

Self-assessment by students:

Depending on the student's proficiency level, ask the student to think about one thing they have learned during this unit. Have them write about it or draw a picture and you can help them write about it.

Ask them what helped them to learn, for example, books, pictures, charts, computer, lists, diagrams, talking, games, and crafts.

Ask them what about the unit was hard for them.

Teacher assessment:

Assessment by the teacher must take during the unit lessons. Teachers will be able to assess the student's progress in many areas. Is the student following directions? Is the student participating verbally, using short phrases or sentences, or complete sentences. Are they self correcting their grammatical errors? Can they make comparisons or add details? The purpose of the unit was to help students move forward through the stages of language acquisition while learning some content based instruction. This unit will help students from Mexico connect with their own culture and will help other students gain an understanding of the Mexican Culture. Students should be able to retell the story of how the Aztecs walked south and built their city where Mexico City is today.

Additional resources and activities:

There are many good websites on the Aztecs. Students could search for information at: www.yahooligans.com
Some of the sites are interactive and have video and audio.
Some of the ones I liked include:

http://home.freeuk.net/elloughton13/aztecs.htm
www.ancientmexico.com
http://library.thinkquest.org/27981
http://library.thinkquest.org/16325
www.indians.org/welker/aztec.htm
www.elbalero.gob.mx/kids/history/html/conquista/aztecas.html

At the www.crayola .com website, there are many art activities along with lesson plans that could easily complement the lessons I have planned here. There are also lots of related resources that could be used in addition to the ones I chose to use.

Some other books I found include:

The Desert Mermaid/ La Serena del Desierto. Blanco, Alberto. Children's Book Press, 1992. (A legend from Mexico)
The Woman Who Outshone the Sun. Martinez, Alexandro Cruz. Children's book Press, 1991. (Zapotec legend in English and Spanish)
Multicultural Myths and Legends. McCarthy, Tara. Scholastic Professional Books, 1994. (Contains a Toltec legend of Quezalcoatl)
Mexico, the Culture. Kalman, Bobbie. Crabtree Publishing, 2002.
Mexico, the People. Kalman, Bobbie. Crabtree Publishing, 2002.
The Pinata Maker, El Pinatero. Ancona, George. Harcourt Brace & Co., 1994.
Fiesta USA. Ancona, George. Lodestar, 1995. (A photo essay on Hispanic festivals in the US)
The Sad Night: The Story of an Aztec Victory and a Spanish Loss. Mathews, Sally S. Clarion, 1994. (The story of Cortes and Moctezuma's first encounter)
La Montana del Alimento/The Legend of food Mountain. Rohmer, Harriet. Children's Book Press, 1988. (A bilingual Aztec legend of Quezalcoatl bringing corn to the first people)

The ESL Standards for Pre – K – 12 Students are available at the TESOL website. They are copyrighted so I am not going to correlate them with this unit. Here is a list of the skills I feel will be utilized by students who are involved with this unit.

Skills Acquired/Utilized/Reinforced

Reading/Thinking

- Setting a purpose for reading
- Activating prior knowledge
- Comparing and contrasting with graphic aids
- Inferring
- Evaluating
- Classifying
- Summarizing/Generalizing
- Visualizing
- Drawing Conclusions
- Elaborating
- Cause and Effect
- Sequence of events

Grammar/Language

- Nouns
- Adjectives
- Verbs
- Sentence structure

Writing

- Venn diagram
- Descriptions
- Self assessments
- Lists
- Labels

Listening/Speaking

- Listening
- Retelling
- Collaboration
- Art activities
- Connections between literature and art

Vocabulary

- Word meanings
- Related words
- Understanding words in context

Questions? Contact me at: mlamken@esu9.org

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